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AN ADDRESS

TO THE

QUARTERLY, MONTHLY AND PREPARATIVE MEETINGS,
AND THE MEMBERS THEREOF,

COMPOSING THE

YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS,

HELD IN PHILADELPHIA,

*By the Committee appointed at the late Yearly Meeting
to have charge of the*

SUBJECT OF SLAVERY.



PHILADELPHIA:

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Minutes of the Yearly Meeting of Men and Women Friends, appointing the Committee to have charge of the subject of Slavery.

Seventeenth of the 5th mo. 1839.

“ A concern being spread before this meeting on subjects connected with the welfare of the people of colour, both bond and free; and it being believed that an advantage would arise not only to that deeply injured people, but also to those who hold them in bondage, as well as to the support of our christian testimony against Slavery, from the appointment of a Committee to take charge of the subject generally; upon consideration, a Committee of four Friends from each Quarterly Meeting was appointed, to unite with women Friends in attending to the concern as way may open, and to report to our next Yearly Meeting.”

Extracted from the Minutes,

BENJAMIN PRICE, JR. Clerk.

“ By a deputation from the men’s meeting, we are informed that the deeply interesting subject of

Slavery, in its various aspects, has claimed its attention, and that the exercise produced thereby has resulted in a belief that it will conduce to the benefit of our Society, and the advancement of its testimony in this respect, to appoint a Committee to have charge of this concern the ensuing year; much unity has been expressed with it in this meeting, and a Committee was appointed to unite with our brethren therein.”

Extracted from the Minutes of the Yearly Meeting of women Friends,

DEBORAH F. WHARTON, Clerk.

ADDRESS.

DEAR FRIENDS,

In accordance with the object of our appointment, we feel engaged affectionately to address you. In referring to the history of our Religious Society, from its rise to the present day, abundant evidence is given that it was called to maintain christian testimonies, which are eminently designed to exalt the standard of truth and righteousness, and to promote the present and everlasting welfare of the human family. Yet, on the very threshold of this subject, we are arrested with a fact, calculated to clothe us with an humbling evidence of human weakness, and to inculcate a lesson of charity. Many of our forefathers were slave-holders, and the unrighteous practice of holding our fellow-creatures in bondage, was not then forbidden by our discipline.

In process of time, individuals were raised up in the Society, who saw with clearness the injustice

and cruelty of this practice, and endeavoured to convince their brethren. Among these we find Anthony Benezet and John Woolman. The calm and cogent reasoning of the latter, as manifested in his appeal to slave-holders, must have exerted a powerful influence. He addressed his "Considerations" to the understanding and inward sense of right, aiming to reach the judgment and awaken the conscience, being clothed in an eminent degree with the benign and peaceable spirit of his Divine Master. After years of patient and faithful exercise, the efforts of himself and his co-labourers were signally blessed; the scales fell from the eyes of their fellow members, and the Religious Society of Friends cleared itself from the enormous evil of holding their fellow-creatures in unconditional bondage.

Having liberated their own slaves, they felt religiously concerned to labour with others, and the voice of the Society was repeatedly heard on behalf of the oppressed, in the state legislatures, and in the Congress of the United States. The public and private labours of some members, at this period, were very arduous, and they devoted much time in pleading the cause of the slave. Purity, integrity, and christian meekness, adorned, to a great extent, the lives of these early advocates of human rights. The long known and established principles of peace which marked the Society of Friends as a body,

placed them in a position peculiarly calculated to gain the attention and confidence of slave-holders. Added to this, their honesty of purpose, and, in pursuance of this object, their exemption from political plans and personal aggrandizement, were undoubted; and their faithful efforts had an important influence over the minds of many oppressors.

For some years, this interesting subject has taken a deeper hold of many friends of humanity, who are not associated with us in religious fellowship. It has risen like a stream that at first reached only to the ankles, but is now become as a mighty river, apparently resistless in its course. Not only within our own land, but from Isles and Nations afar off, the responsive voice of Philanthropy is borne as on the wings of the wind, enforcing the practical injunction of our blessed Lord, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

The advancement of this righteous concern, and the increase of light upon the subject of human rights, are causing this system of iniquity to totter to its base. Hence, under the influence of fearful excitement, many are putting forth their strength to impede the progress of principles, which, if ultimately triumphant, will break the fetters of the slave. A part of the trading interests at the North

is evidently involved with those of the South, and an influence is in this way exerted against the onward course of Emancipation; thus light and darkness antagonize each other.

While all around us exhibits awful collisions, and the inflamed and angry passions of men, are comparable to the troubled sea casting up mire and dirt, we, as a body of christians, are imperiously called upon, to seek and rely upon that Almighty Power which can alone "control the whirlwind and direct the storm." The mantle which covered our forefathers in their labours in the cause of human rights, we humbly hope has fallen on us. Let us then stand at the mouth of the cave, as the warring elements are passing before us, let us wrap the face in the mantle, waiting to hear that still small voice, which speaks from heaven.

That conflicting opinions, as to the course proper to be pursued, do now exist in our Society, is obvious. But if we, as a people, dwell near the fountain of Divine Goodness, we shall be equally preserved from apathy and negligence on the one hand, as from intemperate zeal and creaturely activity on the other; so that in the peaceable spirit and wisdom of Jesus, all may join in harmonious labour, as with the heart of one man.

Within a few years, great events have occurred in relation to Slavery, and much light has been spread on the subject. The experience derived from Emancipation in the British West Indies, has opened a new era. In the midst of violent opposition, the great truth has been successfully realized, that liberated slaves may with safety immediately become freemen; and that the actual interests of their former masters, as well as their own, may be greatly promoted by the change.

On this point as well as others, it is thought much benefit would result from spreading correct information among all our members; fully believing that as Friends are apprized of well authenticated facts, connected with this deeply affecting question as it now stands, that their interest and zeal will also increase in the promotion of our righteous testimony against Slavery; and as we reverently seek for Divine direction under an humbling sense of our own weakness, we shall be brought near to each other in the unity of the Spirit, which is the bond of peace.

Although we would avoid entering far into particular views, yet there is one portion of our southern brethren on whose account our sympathetic feelings are called forth. While we have painful evidence that a great body of slave-holders are in-

fluenced by injustice and cruelty, while they stiffen their necks, and harden their hearts, against all entreaties on behalf of their oppressed slaves, we believe this is far from being the case with all who hold their fellow-creatures in bondage. There are many whose consciences are burdened by a system which they derived from their ancestors, who find themselves surrounded by iniquitous and restraining laws against Emancipation. A swift witness in the soul assures them that their obedience in this instance to the laws of man, is a fearful violation of the law of God. These feel the want of kind and judicious advisers to aid in extricating them from their tried situation.

Self-interest might prompt them speedily to free themselves from difficulty; the money of the slave-trader is temptingly held up before them; but humanity shudders at the thought: they cannot separate the tender ties of family connexion among their slaves; they dare not receive the price of blood. They look on the right hand and there is none to help, on the left, and there is none to uphold. We believe they are fervently desiring the deliverance of master and slave, from the bondage to which both are subjected. Their hearts have bounded with joy at the success of Emancipation in the British West Indies; it has opened a door of hope that they also may be legally permitted to

prove the advantage of requited labour, over that which is extorted by the lash of the oppressor.

As the secret exercises and prayers of these ascend before the Lord of Sabaoth, whose ear is open to their cry, and as they are faithful to the convictions of duty, they will become as a city set on an hill; their example will aid in dispelling the cloud of thick darkness which now envelopes so many in their various neighbourhoods.

Thus, dear brethren and sisters, we have entered on the duties assigned us by our late Yearly Meeting. We trust we are aware of the responsibility involved in our appointment, and are sensible of our own weakness and insufficiency for the work before us. But this work is the Lord's, and as we consecrate ourselves to his service, attentively watching the pointings of duty, and moving under the banner of the Prince of Peace, we may hope that a blessing will attend our labours.

Believing an advantage will arise in reviving the exercise which prevailed in our Yearly Meeting in 1837, we subjoin the report which was read and united with, and sent down in the Extracts of that year, viz:

“The Committee appointed by the Yearly Meet-

ing to take into consideration the subject of Slavery, brought up from last year, report,

“That having deliberated on this interesting subject, the Committee are free to propose that the Yearly Meeting recommend to our members, to embrace every right opening to maintain and exalt our righteous testimony against Slavery; and where any of our members feel any religious scruples as to the use of the products of slave labour, that they faithfully attend thereto; and also that the attention of Friends be directed to the education and moral improvement of the people of colour in their several neighbourhoods.”

In closing, we desire the aid of your spirits, and ask your earnest and faithful co-operation in the promotion of a cause so deeply interesting to the welfare of the human family.

Signed by direction and on behalf of the Committee, by

JOHN JACKSON, Clerk.





